

Hydroelectric plant proposed

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LOGAN — A Logan company says construction of a hydroelectric plant near Bear Lake could solve Utah's future energy problems.

Symbiotics LLC wants to build the Hook Canyon Pump Project on Rich County's Fish Hook Creek. The plant would pump water from Bear Lake at night and release it back to the lake during the day, to generate electricity.

Erik Stemile, company director of environmental compliance, says the proposal could meet about 85 percent of Utah's current peak energy demands if it's used in concert with conservation efforts.

As proposed, the pumped water would cause the lake to rise and fall at least three inches a day.

State fisheries biologist Scott Tolentino said that could stir up the lake's bottom settlement, altering Bear Lake's water clarity and changing its unique blue color. The project could also threaten four species of fish unique to the lake by changing their feeding patterns.

"As far as the project goes, I think there's a lot of potential for bad things that could happen to Bear Lake from the project," said Tolentino, who works for the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources.

The project would include a 160-foot dam, a reservoir to store 1,210 acre-feet of water and a powerhouse with two generating units.

Former Bear Lake State Park manager Eldon Robinson said this isn't the first time a hydroelectric plant has been proposed for the lake. Previous proposals were defeated. Like Tolentino, Robinson fears a plant would change the lake.

"We're working with a really delicate ecosystem there," said Robinson, who managed the park for 27 years. "My opinion is it's not worth the chance we'd take by disturbing or taking or altering the uniqueness of Bear Lake."

Symbiotics plans a two-year environmental study to determine what affect the project might have on the lake, Stemile said. Currently, there isn't sufficient evidence to support claims of changes to the lake's color or damage to its fish species, he said.

"It's also a dynamic process," Stemile said. "If we determine there's an aspect of the project that could affect any aspect of environmental quality, we could alter the project."

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission will also conduct an independent environmental study.

A series of community meetings are planned to provide information about the project.

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